

Standard Authors' Booklets

Henry Fielding

BY

J. WALKER McSPADDEN



NUMBER THREE

PRICE, TEN CENTS

Published by
CROSCUP & STERLING COMPANY
135 Fifth Avenue, New York





HENRY FIELDING.

(1707-1754.)

Standard Authors' Booklets.

Henry Fielding

BY

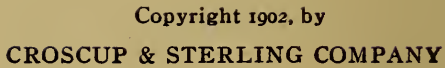
J. WALKER McSPADDEN



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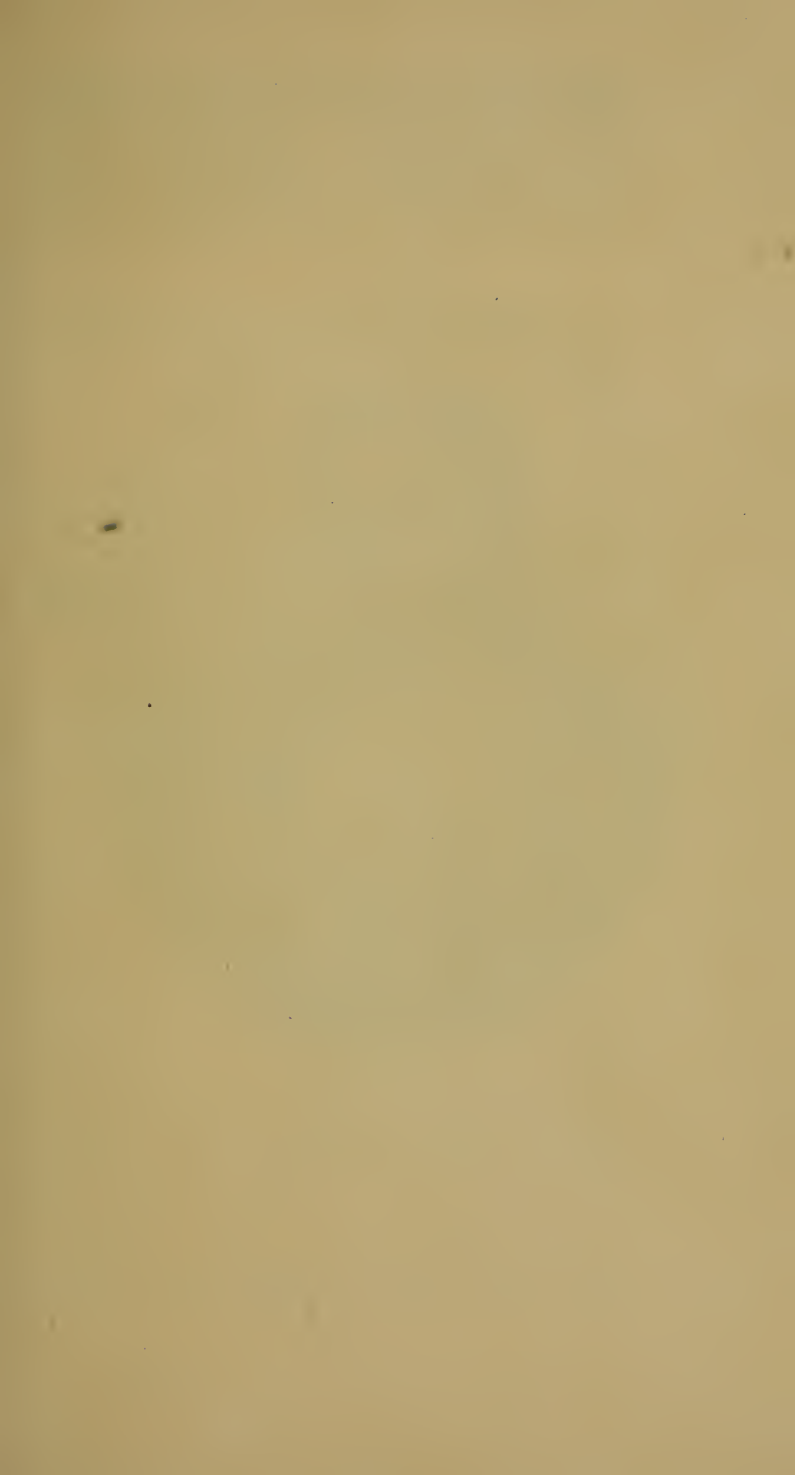
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MRS. OLDFIELD.

See pp. 13 and 14.



Henry Fielding

I. The Time

HENRY FIELDING is the Cervantes of Eighteenth Century England. With his deep irony and trenchant wit he stormed the castles of sentimentalism and opened the way for worthier, saner structures. His work must be judged not by its surface, but by its inner currents and the influence upon subsequent literary thought.

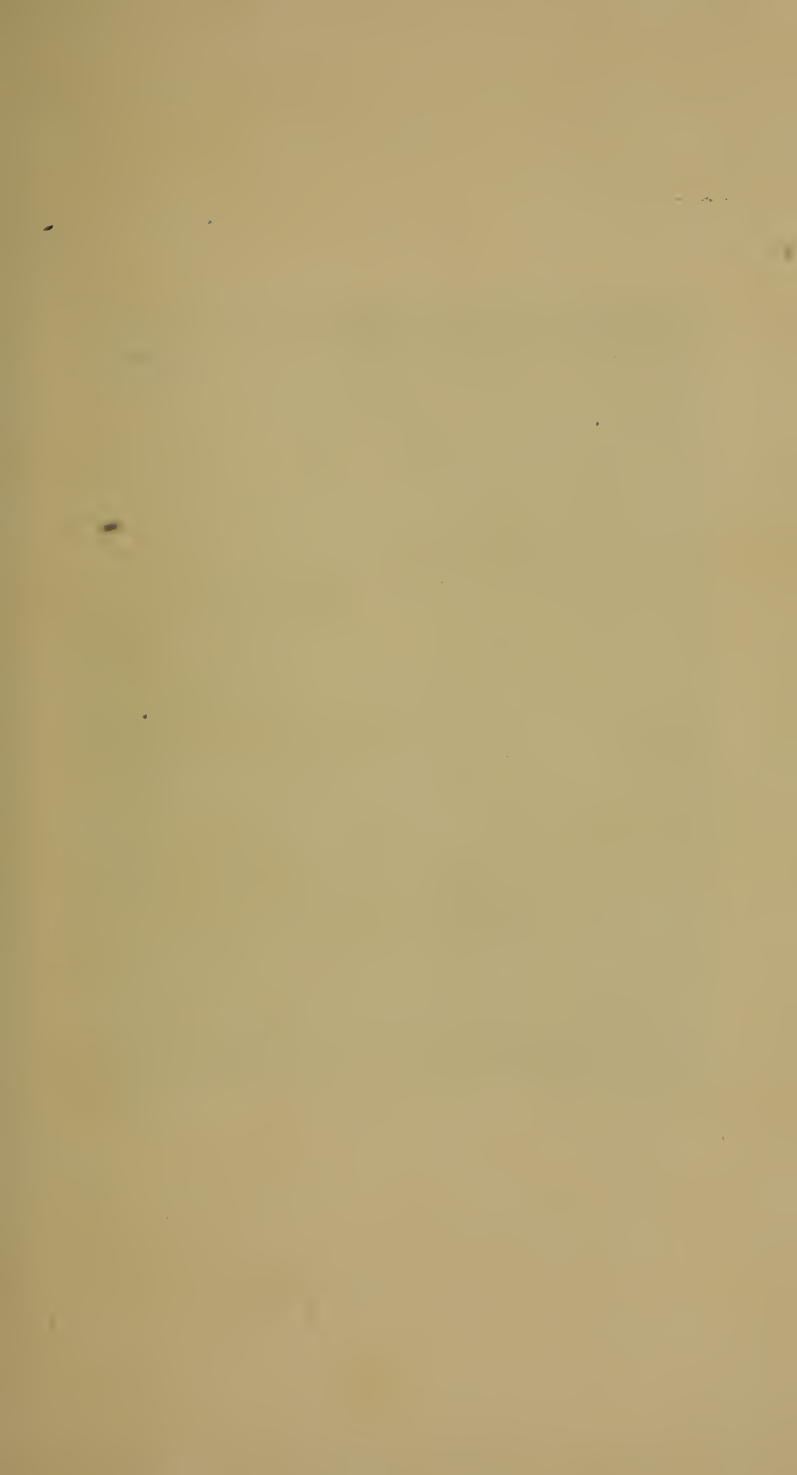
With the restoration of Charles II to the throne in 1660, England threw off the sedate life of the Puritans and plunged into a wild riot of merriment and debauch. The literature reflected the popular trend; and the concluding years of the seventeenth century produced novels and plays of anything but edifying character. The stage had deteriorated and palled upon the public taste, which turned for a season to foreign romances of adventure and intrigue—books often sunk in a mire of moral filth though screened by court tinsel and pageantry.

Then came Swift with his satires, "Tale of a Tub" and "Gulliver's Travels," and Defoe

with his sustained narrative "Robinson Crusoe." These marked a transition. The beginning of the eighteenth century found a field large and inviting for a new type of fiction.

To Richardson—that name called up in any survey of Fielding—belongs credit for the founding of a new school: the novel of character and manners, which is the prototype of modern fiction. In his own words, he wished to turn the minds of young persons "into a course of reading different from the pomp and parade of romance writing." Above all things, he desired to combat the unhealthful tendency of foreign fiction and ground his plots sternly upon moral conduct. In "Pamela, or Virtue Rewarded," his heroine is made to undergo severe temptation and withstand many assaults upon her chastity; and finally to reclaim her libertine lover through the very force of her steadfastness. In "Clarissa Harlowe," the heroine is depicted as falling a prey to circumstance, but still displaying the dignity of a resistant virtue.

All this was very well for the morals of the time; but Richardson came near erring through excess of zeal. In his eagerness to point the only safe path for virtue, he undeniably revealed scenes of such glaring realism as to affect unfavorably many younger minds particularly susceptible to such influence. He reminds us of Du Maurier's sketch in "Punch," where the old lady says to her grandson: "You surely did not climb into the bathtub with your clothes on!" To which the young hopeful replies: "No, but I will do it."





MRS. CLIVE.
See p. 14.

Upon this defect of morbid sentimentalism one man looked—smiled—and winked solemnly. That man was Henry Fielding—wit, rake, man-about-town, lawyer, dramatist, and henceforth novelist. Let us glance back a moment at this humorist's antecedents and life.

II. The Man



HENRY FIELDING could boast a long line of illustrious ancestors, says Austin Dobson. There was a Sir William Feilding (so spelled) killed at Tewkesbury, and a Sir Everard who had commanded at Stoke. Another Sir William was created Earl of Denbigh and fell fighting for King Charles. Of his two sons, the elder was a Parliamentarian, and the younger was raised to the peerage of Ireland. From the younger branch Henry directly descended, being of the fourth generation. Edmund Fielding, his father, had served with distinction in the army under Marlborough. About the age of thirty he left the service with the rank of lieutenant and married Sarah, daughter of Sir Henry Gould, of Sharpsham Park, Somerset, a Judge of the King's Bench. Henry was the eldest of five children resulting from this union.

The author of "Tom Jones" was born at

Sharpham Park, on the 22d of April, 1707. When but two or three years old his parents removed to East Stour, Dorsetshire, and it is there that Henry's boyhood was passed. His first schooling was had under a private tutor. Later he went to Eton, where he must have known William Pitt, Henry Fox, George Lyttelton and Gilbert West. From Eton he went to Leyden University, but remittances of the family allowance presently failing, he was forced to return to London and endeavor to make his own livelihood. He was now in his twentieth year.

Fielding had been educated with a view of becoming a lawyer, but in London he early decided to give up that profession and attempt to live by his wits. As he himself jocosely remarked, "I must be either a hackney coachman or a hackney-writer." He therefore turned to writing plays, several of which were produced with some success by the best actors and actresses of the time, such as Garrick and Mrs. Oldfield. Of these plays we shall take occasion to speak again later. The young author was now serving his apprenticeship and gradually acquiring more and more facility with his pen. As to his pecuniary success we cannot be so certain. But about the spring of 1735 he married a Miss Charlotte Cradock, an attractive young woman, whom he seemed to have loved, and who was an heiress in her own right. He withdrew from London with her to his early home in Dorsetshire, where (according to some biographers) he squandered her money and his

own in riotous living and lavish entertaining—for he was always a man who lived largely and not always cautiously. Be that as it may, we find him again in London, in the succeeding year, when he became manager of the Haymarket Theatre. Shortly afterward he entered the Middle Temple as a student of law, but again his literary bent asserted itself, and in 1739 he began writing for the "Champion," a periodical of essays modeled along the lines of the "Tatler." The first of his novels, "Joseph Andrews," was published in 1742, to be followed at intervals by the three other books of the great quartette upon which his fame rests—"Jonathan Wild," "Tom Jones" and "Amelia," the last being completed in 1751.

Meanwhile he had eked out his living by editing other journals and by serving as a justice of the peace. In 1754, failing health obliged him to journey to Lisbon, where he died on the 8th of October in that year.

In person Fielding was tall and large (says Keightley) being upwards of six feet high; and he seems to have attached much value to physical power, for he forms all his heroes after his own likeness. In consequence probably of his formation, he appears to have had a high relish for animal enjoyments. But we have no proof that his life was otherwise than regular after his marriage. Even in his most licentious days he never lost his respect for religion and virtue.

Says Taine: "Fielding protests on behalf of nature; and certainly to see his actions and

his person, we might think him made expressly for that: a robust, strongly-built man, above six feet, sanguine, with an excess of good humour and animal spirits, loyal, generous, affectionate and brave, but impudent, extravagant, a drinker, a roysterer, ruined as it were by his heirloom, having seen the ups and downs of life, bespattered, but always jolly. . . . Force, activity, invention, tenderness, all overflowed in him. He had a mother's fondness for his children, adored his wife, became almost mad when he lost her, found no other consolation than to weep with his maidservant, and ended by marrying that good and honest girl, that he might give a mother to his children; the last trait in the portrait of his valiant plebeian heart, quick in telling all, possessing no dislikes, but all the best parts of man except delicacy. We read his books as we drink a pure, wholesome and rough wine, which cheers and fortifies us, and which wants nothing but boquet."



III. The Playwright



ALZAC, serving his apprenticeship in a Parisian garret, first turned his hand to writing "blood-and-thunder" novels, now carefully classified—and avoided—as "Works of Youth." To the young man Fielding, cut off from the family allowance and facing life in London, the easiest path to literature, if not wealth, seemed to be the drama. In 1728 there were not many theatres in London, but the two or three then open were destined to lasting fame by reason of the actors and plays produced. First, there was the old Opera House in the Haymarket, built in 1705 upon the site now occupied by Her Majesty's Theatre. Opposite it stood the New, or Little Theatre in the Haymarket. Then there was the theatre in Lincoln's Inn Fields, and finally, oldest of them all, came the Theatre-Royal in Drury Lane, where played Colley Cibber, Robert Wilks, Barton Booth and Mrs. Anne Oldfield. The following year, Goodman's Fields opened its doors, and here it was that Garrick first appeared. Covent Garden belongs to a later year.

The young Fielding was fortunate enough to secure the interest of Mrs. Oldfield, Wilks and Cibber in regard to his first play, "Love in Several Masques." It was put on at Drury Lane, with Mrs. Oldfield in the leading femi-

nine rôle, and its success, in whatever degree, was probably due to her art and popularity. In another play, "The Lottery," presented three years later, he was again fortunate in enlisting the services of Miss Raftor, who was later to reach the heights of histrionic fame as Mrs. Clive. This splendid actress remained for several years a staunch friend of the young playwright, and undoubtedly contributed largely to his success. Later he had the advice and assistance of David Garrick. Fielding's dramatic lines had been cast in profitable places. For nearly ten years he wrote plays, chiefly in the burlesque or comic vein. One of his earliest biographers said of them: "Though it must be acknowledged that in the whole collection there are few plays likely to make any considerable figure on the stage hereafter [this was in 1762], yet they are worthy of being preserved, being the works of a genius who in his wildest and most inaccurate productions yet occasionally displays the talent of a master. Though in the plan of his plays he is not always regular, yet he is often happy in diction and style; and in every group that he has exhibited there are to be seen particular delineations that will amply recompense the attention bestowed upon them."

Perhaps his most enduring plays are "Tom Thumb," "Pasquin," "The Miser" and "The Wedding Day." Others, while receiving attention at the time, relied for popularity upon their satire of contemporary events. Fielding the playwright began at twenty and ended at

thirty years. Fielding the novelist was the more experienced man of forty, writing not because pressed by want—as may have been the case in some of the plays—but because he had obtained a larger vision of life, and was called upon to set down what he saw—soberly, calmly, and with the pen of abiding genius.

IV. The Novelist



WE have already pictured Fielding as smiling over the sentimentalism of Richardson's "Pamela." It was this smile that led to the end of the playwriting and the beginning of the novel-making on the part of the humorist. Seized by an impulse to ridicule, he began "Joseph Andrews"; but it ended far above the bounds its author had set for it. Then came "Jonathan Wild"—still in a spirit of ridicule. Finally, with the appearance of "Tom Jones" and "Amelia," England awoke to the fact that she had another master novelist.

JOSEPH ANDREWS

The biting satire of "Joseph Andrews" lies in the situation. Joseph is made the brother of Richardson's virtuous Pamela, assailed in his turn by all the temptations which had caused her woe. But, in this case, a reversal of the sexes results in a broad burlesque. The

story speedily grows beyond a parody, however, and takes on a more dignified and independent interest. And at least two characters destined to immortality are produced, in the persons of Mrs. Slipslap and Parson Adams—who alone abundantly justify the existence of this book and absolve it from the weakness of a parody. Upon its title-page “Joseph Andrews” is declared to be “written in imitation of the manner of Cervantes,” and indeed we can see many touches common to the Spanish writer, especially in the troubles and adventures of the well-meaning Parson. Like Cervantes, too, Fielding was applying vigorous weapons against a faulty condition. The “womanish” Richardson, being offended by an impure literature, had gone to an extreme of avoidance. With coarse laughter, Fielding represents the return swing of the pendulum, and his work is to influence a wholesome medium—not directly, but by suggestion.

JONATHAN WILD

“‘Jonathan Wild,’” says Coleridge, “is assuredly the best of all the fictions in which a villain is throughout the prominent character.” Again we have a satire by reversion—this time, not of the sexes, but of types. Instead of choosing a hero of integrity and honor, the author deliberately holds up a villain to be admired. The satire is in no way directed against genuine worth—as the author is careful to explain—but against the conventionality of romance where there is always “a virtuous

and gallant hero, a wicked monster his opposite, and a pretty girl who finds a champion." Thackeray, whom we have just quoted, continues: "In that strange apologue [of "Jonathan Wild"] the author takes for a hero the greatest rascal, coward, traitor, tyrant, hypocrite, that his wit and experience, both large in this matter, could enable him to devise or depict: he accompanies this villain through all the actions of his life, with a grinning deference and a wonderful mock respect; and does not leave him until he is dangling at the gallows, when the satirist makes him a low bow and wishes the scoundrel good-day."

TOM JONES

Once more we see the influence of Cervantes in "Tom Jones," the classic upon which Fielding's larger fame rests. "Like 'Don Quixote,'" says Dobson, "'Tom Jones' is the precursor of a new order of things—the earliest and freshest expression of a new departure in art. But while 'Tom Jones' is to the full as amusing as 'Don Quixote,' it has the advantage of a greatly superior plan, and an interest more skillfully sustained. The incidents which in Cervantes simply succeed each other like the scenes in a panorama are, in 'Tom Jones,' but parts of an organized and carefully-arranged procession towards a foreseen conclusion." One of the chief marvels of this story is its plot—always kept well in hand, however intricate. Each scene, no matter how apparently

trivial, has been placed there with reference to some other episode. The wonder of it all is seen after the story is ended—if the reader do but look back at the many finely joined parts of the superstructure.

The other great claim for this novel—and perhaps the chiefest—is its picture of life and manners. Fielding has succeeded in photographing his characters so clearly that after the lapse of a century and a half they seem real and living. This does not mean that we admire them all. The hero himself is not entitled to unequivocal admiration. He sows wild oats too generously to serve as a model; and his repentance, however sincere, comes too close on the promise of his reward. But, as Henry Morley says, the book breathes health. The convention of the time did not forbid a direct picturing of its evil; and the scenes good and bad are always given for what they are, and with no false gloss upon them. Vice is not made ethically triumphant over virtue; while the whole texture of thought and action is imbued with the charm of genius.

AMELIA

In point of general excellence, “Amelia” is generally considered inferior to “Tom Jones,” yet it presents pictures of domestic life which make it highly valuable on its own account. It is also morally stronger than its predecessor. The prodigal Captain Booth is a better man than the erratic Tom Jones. Traits in each of

them lead us to suspect that they are patterned to an extent after Fielding himself. There is little doubt but that the author had his own wife in mind when he drew the portrait of Amelia. "To have invented that character," says Thackeray, "is not only a triumph of art but it is a good action. They say that it was in his own house that Fielding knew her and loved her; and from his own wife he drew the most charming character in English fiction. —Fiction! Why fiction! why not history? I know Amelia just as well as Lady Mary Wortley Montagu."

"Of all his novels," says E. P. Whipple, "'Amelia' leaves the finest impression of quiet domestic delight, of the sweet home feeling, and the humanities connected with it. . . . Amelia herself, the wife and mother, arrayed in all matronly graces, with her rosy children about her, is a picture of womanly gentleness and beauty, and unostentatious heroism, such as never leaves the imagination in which it has once found a place."



V. Miscellaneous Writings



SURVEY of the work of Fielding would be incomplete without mention of his poems and miscellaneous writings. One of his earliest published works was a versified adaptation into English of part of Juvenal's sixth satire—a broad satire in octosyllabic lines aimed ostensibly at some of the evils of society in Fielding's own time. In the first volume of his "Miscellanies" was printed a collection of love poems, which their author declared to be "Productions of the Heart rather than of the Head." It was published in 1743, the year in which appeared "The Journey from this World to the Next," a witty satire culminating, in the narrative, with the author's entrance into Elysium. This book lacks coherence, but is enlivened by some amusing passages.

Mention has already been made of Fielding's contributions to the "Champion." These essays form a rich collection of current comment, comprising enough material in themselves for a good-sized volume. His essay writing was not limited to this periodical, but also found expression in the "True Patient," the "Jacobites' Journal," and the "Covent Garden Journal." All this scattered material has now been pretty definitely identified by scholars.

In the legal field this indefatigable man likewise left his impress. His magistracy resulted in the writing up of some of his most interest-





FRONT OF THEATRE IN THE HAYMARKET.



SHARPHAM HOUSE,
Fielding's Birthplace.

ing cases, such as that of "Elizabeth Canning" and that of "Bosavern Penlez"; and also a clear-cut "Enquiry into the Causes of the late Increase of Robbers," which was dedicated to the Lord High Chancellor, Lord Hardwicke, by whom, as well as by more recent legal authorities, it was highly appreciated.

In 1743 appeared the three volumes of "Miscellanies," the first of which included a lengthy preface, Fielding's poems, and essays "On Conversation," "On the Knowledge of the Character of Men," and "On Nothing." The second volume included the "Journey from this World to the Next" and two of his plays. The third volume was wholly occupied with "Jonathan Wild."

Ten years later Fielding began his "Journal of a Voyage to Lisbon." To that city he had gone in quest of health, and there it was he died. The story of the closing months of his life as related by himself is "one of the most unfeigned and touching little tracts in our own or any other literature." Here we obtain a final glimpse of the man, and by far the best. We see him a sufferer, a wanderer, and a courteous gentleman. If any portrait of him is to be handed down to history, let it be the last rather than the first; not the Fielding of the green-room and the tavern, but he of maturer and sedate years—the tender husband and father, the kindly host of his poorer friends, the chivalrous and patient wanderer in a "Voyage to Lisbon."

NOTE.—For a complete list of Fielding's Writings see pages 30 to 32.

VI. Friends and Contemporaries



INGULARLY enough, the one name indissolubly connected with Fielding is not that of a friend; for Richardson never understood his rival novelist, and never forgave him for his parodies. But the two names have come to be closely welded as the chiefest novelists of the time, and their work standing at opposite goals has jointly established the bounds of succeeding fiction.

Nor could the literary dictator, Dr. Samuel Johnson, be called a friend of Fielding's; he was too strong an adherent of Richardson's for that. And although the Doctor read at least one of Fielding's books through without stopping, he could never be induced to do more than studiously find fault with them.

Fielding paid more than one tribute to the abilities of Alexander Pope both as translator of the "Iliad," and as author of the "Essay on Man," but some doubt exists as to their personal relations. For a time they appear to have been more hostile than friendly.

Thomas Gray, the poet, was not in sympathy with Fielding's method. He wrote a cold critique of "Joseph Andrews," but at the same time could discern the power of the pen which produced it.

Smollett, Colley Cibber, and Sir Robert Walpole were among others who waged war

against him. Smollett's took the form of personal rancor, aroused because of Fielding's criticisms of "Roderick Random" and "Peregrine Pickle," and found vent in a coarse, abusive pamphlet full of brutal strictures. Cibber was put upon the defensive by certain bantering personalities aimed at him in the "Champion," and to which he replied by his famous "Apology." Why Cibber and Fielding grew apart is not known, for in the latter's early days the actor had helped him greatly. Walpole's malice was called forth by Fielding's covert satires on his administration.

Andrew Millar, the book-publisher and seller, proved a serviceable friend to Fielding. Millar, it may be remembered, was the publisher of Johnson's Dictionary. He brought out Fielding's works with considerable success. Horace Walpole writes: "Millar, the bookseller, has done very generously by him; finding Tom Jones, for which he had given him six hundred pounds, sell so greatly, he has given him another hundred."

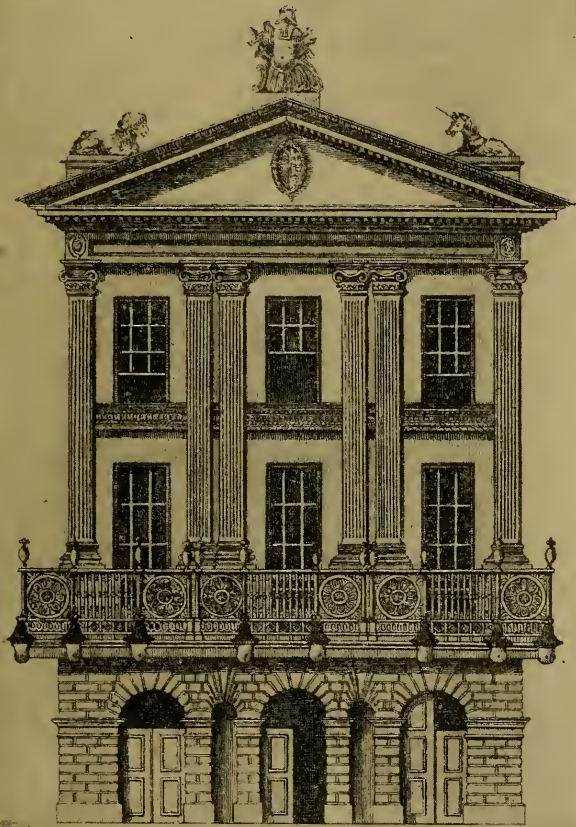
William Hogarth drew one of the best portraits of Fielding (the one included in the present booklet). A friendship and admiration seem always to have been maintained between the two men. Fielding spoke in highest terms of both the drawings and the writings of Hogarth, and the latter acknowledged the compliment by kindly references in his turn.

A friend of very great value to Fielding was George, Lord Lyttelton, whom he first met in his schoolboy days at Eton. Lyttel-

ton manifested lively interest in his friend throughout his life; and there is even a hint that he helped him out of financial straits. "Tom Jones" was dedicated to him, and the author says: "Without your assistance this History had never been completed."

We have already spoken of the stage friends of Fielding—Garrick, Mrs. Oldfield, and Mrs. Clive. And mention must be made of his distinguished second-cousin, Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, whose prominence and influence aided him greatly in his early years. She gave him excellent assistance in perusing and criticizing his plays, and left a definite impress upon his character and writings. Another kinswoman who influenced his early London life was Miss Sarah Andrew with whom he fell desperately in love. He would have eloped with her, it is said, had she not been removed beyond his reach. Her image, however, was never effaced from his memory; and it is believed that she is pictured in the lovely portrait of Sophia Western, in "Tom Jones."

Sarah Jennings, first Duchess of Marlborough, and wife of the famous military commander, was noted for the acidity of her tongue no less than for her mental attainments. Her frequent broils with statesmen led to an attack upon her in a current magazine, which was attributed to Johnson, and which Fielding characterized as scurrilous. He replied in a "Vindication." But as to his personal relations with the dowager or her friendship for him, we can only surmise.



FRONT of DRURY-LANE-THEATRE.

Ralph Allen, a country gentleman, renowned for his lavish hospitality, was a loyal friend to Fielding, who dedicated "Amelia" to him. Upon the author's death, Allen saw to the education of his children, and settled an hundred pounds a year upon them.

In conclusion, Fielding's relations with his contemporaries were like those with literature. Throughout he was open and courageous—giving of himself generously, yet fearless in attack. His fights, moreover, were in the open light of day and tintured by no mean revenge. To his friends he was unwaveringly true. Says Lowell:—

"Did he good service? God must judge, not
we.

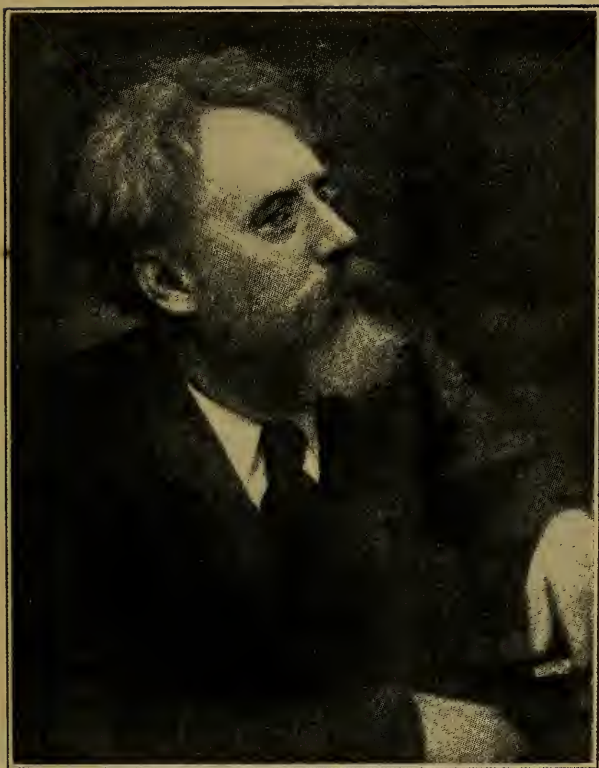
Manly he was; and generous and sincere;
English in all, of genius blithely free;
Who loves a Man may see his image here."



THE NEED OF
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"The real monument which Fielding's memory most needs is one that does not ask for the chisel of any sculptor or the voice of any orator. It is, moreover, a memorial which would neither be difficult to raise nor pecuniarily unprofitable. This memorial is a complete edition of his writings. Though one hundred and thirty years have gone by since his death, this act of justice to his reputation has never yet been performed. Apparently, it has never once been contemplated. A portion of his work—and, in a certain way, of work especially characteristic—is practically inaccessible to the immense majority of English-speaking men. We are the losers by this neglect more than he. The mystery which envelops much of Fielding's career can never be cleared away, the estimate of his character and conduct can never be satisfactorily fixed, until everything he wrote has been put into the hands of independent investigators pursuing separate lines of study."—Thomas R. Lounsbury, LL.D., Yale College.





WILLIAM ERNEST HENLEY, LL.D.,
Editor of the New Fielding.

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The editorship has been undertaken by Mr. William Ernest Henley, who will contribute to the final volume an essay on the *Life, Genius and Achievement of the Author*.

CONTENTS.

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